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KIPLING'S ADVICE
TO
"THE HAT"

In Response to an Appeal

from

An Old-Timer

Of Medicine Hat, Alberta

TO THE READER

This little tract for the times is printed in order that certain gentlemen who are known to their intimate acquaintances as 'Kipling fans' may possess a 'first (separate) edition' which some of their rivals in the engrossing game of book collecting will not be able to buy.

Another reason for making a booklet out of these two letters is the fact that everything from Mr. Kipling's pen has an especial interest to all who profess to care for the technique of writing English for publication. This is quite another matter than suggesting that everything he has written is to be considered as Literature. It does not even hint at any opinions concerning the amount of space that will be allotted to his work by those who write on the history of English literature a century hence.

A part of the price that Mr. Kipling pays for the way in which he wooed the Fame that has so splendidly rewarded his endeavours is this lively

interest in his most casual writing. There is a justification for this interest in the fact, which in a measure explains its existence, that Mr. Kipling has always had something on his mind. Most of the time this has nothing to do specifically with what he is writing about, but inevitably it affects both what he says and the way he says it.

Mr. Kipling, during his productive period, always found a place in which to publish anything that he wanted to see in print. The result is that the development of his ideas can very often be traced over a period of several years. When the first signs crop out, they have every appearance of being merely the sub-conscious expression of some passing thought. Later, as the idea begins to take shape and its possibilities become patent, it is put through all its paces in prose and verse, until it comes under the wire in the perfect form of 'M'Andrew's Hymn' or 'The Brushwood Boy.'

No other English writer, not even Thackeray, offers anything like a commensurate opportunity for those who are trying to learn how to write for publication, to study in detail the methods practiced by an author who succeeded in doing just this. The most skilful literary craftsman of his generation provides all the material for a text book for beginners in his profession. Very few will question that Mr. Kipling possesses a large share

of unmistakable genius; but it is of the variety of genius indistinguishable from unremitting effort directed by an intelligent ambition. This is the soundest justification for a confident prediction that the whole of his writings will retain a place in the corpus of English literature.

G. P. W.

Shandygraft,
New Year's Day, 1923.

Dear Mr. Kipling,—

I am aware, in fact all of us in Medicine Hat are aware, of the interest you took in our little city in your two trips across the continent.

Of course you have very many things to think about, but I am going to be importunate about a certain matter which is vexing our souls here, for not only have you been kind enough to show your interest locally, but we look to you as the Father Confessor of the Empire, and ask you to help us poor stragglers with advice, who are living on the distant frontier. You know, no doubt, that the name of our city is a translation of the old Cree name of the place. It is rich in Indian traditions, eloquent with war-songs of the Black Feet and the Cree, of which I will not bore you.

Besides this, to us 'Old Timers,' the name has grown warm in our hearts, here we have courted our sweet-hearts, married and begot children, and have built our homes, driving our tent pegs deep into Mother Earth, and are going to remain here

to hold up the old British traditions as long as the good God gives us breath.

Well, unfortunately, some newcomers, Sons of Belial (who knew not Joseph) have arisen and WANT TO CHANGE THE NAME OF THE CITY.

It smacks too much of the Injin, smells fearfully of the tee-pee fire, and Kini-ki-nick — reminds outsiders of the whacking lies (may God forgive them) of the U. S. A. newspaper men in regard to our weather, and so forth. In a moment of weakness, our city fathers have decided to submit the question to the vote of the rate payers instead of ordering the proposers to be cast into a den of burning fiery rattlesnakes.

Can you help us with a few words of encouragement in combating these heretics? Your influence here is great. If it is shown that you are against the proposition, it will help us materially.

Apologizing for this long letter, I remain,

Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

Francis F. Fatt

Bateman's, Burwash, Sussex

December 9, 1910.

Dear Sir, —

I have received your letter of the 22nd November which interests me intensely, both as a citizen of the Empire and as a lover of Medicine Hat.

You tell me that a public vote is to be taken on the question of changing the city's name. So far as I can make out from what I heard when I was with you in 1907 and from the clippings you enclose the chief arguments for the change are (a) that some U. S. journalists have some sort of joke that Medicine Hat supplies all the bad weather of the United States, and, (b) that another name would look better at the head of a prospectus.

Incidentally I note both arguments are developed at length by the Calgary Herald. I always knew that Calgary called Medicine Hat names, but I did not realize that Medicine Hat wanted to be Calgary's little god-child.

Now as to the charge of brewing bad weather etc., I see no reason on earth why white men

should be bluffed out of their city's birthright by an imported joke. Accept the charge joyously and proudly, and go forward as Medicine Hat — the only city officially recognized as capable of freezing out the United States and giving the continent the cold feet.

Let us examine the name — Medicine Hat — I haven't my maps by me but I seem to remember a few names of places across the border such as Schenectady, Podunk, Schoharie, Poughkeepsie, Potomac, Cohoes, Tonewanda, Onenoto, etc. all of which are rather curious to the outsider, but times and the lives of men (it is people and not prospectuses that make cities) have sanctified the queer syllables with memories and associations for millions of our fellow creatures. Once on a time these places were young and new and in process of making, themselves. That is to say they were ancestors, with a duty to posterity, which duty they fulfilled in handing on their names intact; and Medicine Hat is today an ancestor — not a derivative, nor a collateral, but the founder of a line.

To my mind the name Medicine Hat has an advantage over all the names I have quoted. It echoes, as you so quaintly put it, of the old Cree and Blackfoot traditions of red mystery and romance that once filled the prairies. Also,

it hints, I venture to think, at the magic that underlies the city, and as years go on, it will become more and more of an asset. It has no duplicate in the world; it makes men ask questions; and as I knew more than twenty years ago, draws the feet of the young men towards it; it has the qualities of uniqueness, individuality, assertion, and power. Above all, it is the lawful, original, sweat-and-dust-won name of the city and to change it would be to risk the luck of the city, to disgust and dishearten Old-Timers, not in the city alone, but the world over, and to advertise abroad the city's lack of faith in itself. Men do not think much of a family that has risen in the world changing its name for social reasons. They think still less of a man who because he is successful repudiates the wife who has stood by him in his early struggles. I do not know what I should say, but I have the clearest notion of what I should think of a town that went back on itself.

Forgive me if I write strongly, but this is a matter of which I feel strongly. As you know, I have not a dollar or a foot of land in Medicine Hat, but I have a large stake of interest and very true affection in and for the city and its folk. It is for this reason that in writing to you I have taken a liberty which to men who have known

the city for several months or perhaps three years must seem inexcusable.

In conclusion it strikes me that the two arguments put forward for the change of name are almost equally bad. The second is perhaps a shade worse than the first. In the first case the town would change its name for fear of being laughed at. In the second it sells its name in the hope of making more money under an alias or as the *Calgary Herald* writes, for the sake of a name that 'has a sound like the name of a man's best girl and looks like business at the head of a financial report.'

But a man's city is a mere trifle more than a man's best girl. She is the living background of his life and love and toil and hope and sorrow and joy. Her success is his success; her shame is his shame; her honor is his honor; and her good name is his good name.

What then should a city be re-christened that has sold its name? — Judasville.

Very sincerely yours

Rudyard Kipling

These two letters were printed in the
Medicine Hat *News* for December 22, 1910
and they have again been put into type

At the Sign of The George
twelve years later as a slight contribution
to an effort to check the increasingly
widespread tendency toward
Universal Conformity.

